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# homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

Monday, October 30, 1944

Subject: "Dehydrated Foods" Information from Office of Distribution officials,  
War Food Administration.

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erve How do dehydrated foods compare in cost, flavor, food value and useability with fresh foods and canned or frozen foods? Will dehydrated foods lose their usefulness when the war ends...or can they contribute to better food in the home after the war?

Before the war we had little dehydrated food business. But when we tried to ship eggs in the shell to Great Britain, many of them broke and many spoiled. Shipping space was short. So the Government turned for help to the handful of men who had been pioneering for years in methods of dehydration. In an amazingly short time plants were ready to dry eggs, milk, fruits, vegetables and even meat. From 4 to 10 times as much food as formerly could be packed into the hold of a ship. It . packed easier, and weighed less. Danger of spoilage was almost negligible. So millions of pounds of dehydrated food reached our Allies and Armed Forces all over the world. When cooks were ready to use it, water was added...or if you prefer technical terms...the food was rehydrated. Almost like magic the little dry, crack-ly bits of onions, potatoes, carrots and other vegetables drank the water till they filled out and again took on their old familiar look.

When the boys come home on furlough their folks like to ask about the food they get in camp or on the battlefield. One young man, home from Italy, was telling about some of his cooking experiences. He was detailed to the cook's unit, so his kid brother was bombarding him with questions like this one: "Did they make you eat any of those dried eggs?" "Listen, Bud", the soldier said, "Nobody had to make us eat dried eggs. When I learned how to mix dried eggs and whole milk powder



with water I could make an omelet that would melt in your mouth. And speaking of dried foods...making vegetable soup out of dried vegetables was a cinch. In 30 minutes... Presto...we had soup as good as Mom's".

Sweet words...those..."As good as Mom's". His Mom, like the rest of us homemakers, has always had fresh or canned vegetables for her soup-making. A few kinds of dried soup mixes came on the market just before the war, but few women in this country have had much experience with dehydrated vegetables. Not that dried foods are new. Food drying is as old as civilization. In this country the Indians often dried venison and beef. Berries and corn, fish and peas were dried by the colonists. And even today when we talk about dried foods we usually think of raisins and prunes or dried apricots and apples.

Sun drying and oven drying usually leave more moisture in the food than does the modern dehydration machine. By the controlled heat methods used today practically all the water is removed. After the vegetables are washed and peeled they are usually cut into tiny cubes, slices or shreds, and then put through a blanching process. Next they go into a chamber where the heated air is driven over it to remove the moisture. The temperature and humidity are controlled exactly, else the outside might get too hard before the inside is dry enough. You have a similar problem in regulating your oven for baking. Potatoes take about 8 hours to dry, but sweet potatoes and onions both take almost twice as long. Most vegetables and fruits are largely water, you know, usually more than three-quarters water. In general, it takes about 10 pounds of fresh vegetables to make one pound of dried vegetables. So a jeep can carry as much food to the front lines as a big truck if this food is dehydrated.

When the boys in service come home to stay those same men who tell of the wonders of dehydrated foods will eat fresh vegetables and fresh fruits...not dried ones. Probably few people prefer dehydrated foods if they can get foods in the natural state. But fresh foods are not always available to every one in all parts





of the country. Neither are canned vegetables within the means of all families.

True, the cost of dehydrating vegetables is about the same as canning and freezing. But the costs after processing differs. Frozen food must be kept at a low temperature. That means transportation in refrigerated cars and continued low temperature in storage...all of which are expensive. And canned goods are heavy and bulky in comparison to dehydrated foods, so the transportation, handling and storage bills are larger.

Dehydrated foods can be packed economically, handled, distributed and stored at much less cost. Supposing that they can be sold at a figure attractive to the homemaker, will she buy dehydrated foods? Would you? You probably would if you were convinced they will taste good, save you money and nourish your family as well as fresh, canned or frozen foods.

Distribution officials of the War Food Administration think that in great metropolitan areas as well as thinly populated sections where distribution costs of fresh food are high, dehydrated food may in the future prove the logical solution. For example, they suggest that the ready prepared diced potatoes that can be cooked, mashed and on the table in 10 minutes may be a very popular commodity for the busy housewives who don't have time to peel and cook fresh potatoes. Too, the compact quality of dried foods could have a big appeal to the homemaker in a small apartment where storage space is limited. And the days when women cry over onions may be a thing of the past. Dried onions need only a 10 minute soaking to prepare them for use like fresh onions...no peeling or cutting. With these thoughts in mind, let's watch the after-the-war progress of dehydrated foods in the home.

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